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AUTHOR	Springer, J.
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on high-risk students and the challenge they present to the community college. The goals of the community college are analyzed and the problems encountered in reaching those goals are discussed. A summary of two workshops held in Chicago entitled "Long Range Results-Academic Supports for the Collegiate Black and Poor," and "Innovations in Recruiting the Culturally Different" is included in the appendix. The question of whether the church can and should make a commitment in terms of time, energy, and funds to change the odds concerning the high-risk student in the community junior college is discussed. (RG)

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THE HIGH-RISK STUDENT, THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE CHURCH AS ADVOCATE

by
J. Springer
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Pennsylvania Baptist Foundation for Campus Ministry
Fifth and Maryland Avenues
Oakmont, Pennsylvania 15139

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THE HIGH-RISK STUDENT, THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
AND
THE CHURCH AS ADVOCATE

By J Springer

Introduction I wish to share with you a challenge, a dream, and a dilemma. All three (the challenge, the dream, and the dilemma) have to do with the growing number of community colleges and their attempt to serve those young people (and older citizens) who have been labeled 'high risk' as far as traditional academic achievement is concerned.

The challenge, what is it? It is hundreds of thousands of young people who are barely graduating from high school, yet who at one time possessed the potential to continue their education, to enhance their skills, to develop their imagination. For most of these young, the potential remains, but it now is defeated, smothered, overcome. Somewhere, sometime, something went wrong. It may have been in the family. (We all know what tremendous pressures are directed against the family these days.) It may have been in the school that it first began. (We all know there are many obstacles to growth in our schools.) It may have been a number of factors from family, from the school, from the community, from the mass media which throttled the further development of these young people's innate talents. Somewhere, sometime, something went wrong. And here they are now, standing at the very edge of society. Some are asleep, not knowing what is happening. Some are confused, knowing - yet not knowing enough. Some are angry, but not really knowing toward whom or what that anger should be directed. Most are frightened. Perhaps they will find a job, or something to busy their lives with. If they do find a job, the chances are very high that there is little future to it. The pay and opportunity will sound tempting now, but in a few years they will know what it means to be caught in a dead-end job with no place to go but some other dead-end job.

The dream, what is it? The dream is a group of educators who seek to reach out to these young people and provide them with a second chance. The dream is a group of educators who believe the potential is still present in these young people, who see strengths and virtues in other dimensions of these young people's interactions with society. The dream is a college of educators who place as a high priority in their program the salvaging of these high-risk young people through the awakening of their innate potential for growth. The dream is a college which would see this task as a basic task, a fundamental task of this college in society, and not as a marginal task. The dream is a college which has these young people foremost in their minds, and not as a novel afterthought.

The dilemma? The dilemma is that, on one hand, we have emerging across our nation the possibility of just such an institution. I refer to the community college. On the other hand, we have a growing number of pressures and concerns which are either contesting or detracting from this task of salvaging our high-risk young. A struggle now is taking place. Decisions are being hammered out. The design of these colleges is now taking shape. The future of these high-risk young in each community is being weighed. The struggle is now. Today, I hope to encourage you to join this struggle.

But why do I address you as a churchman in this concern of mine? Why should I not address you as citizen? I address you as churchman because I think you can appreciate in a particular, unique way the challenge and dream I have just shared

with you. As a person nurtured on the Judeo-Christian vision, I think you can appreciate in a unique way the attempt of educators to go a second mile for some of our young, when all other institutions have the vision and the resources to go only the first mile. As a person committed to the Judeo-Christian vision, I think you can deeply appreciate in a special way the vision of some educators who wish to reach out to those in our society who are being passed by 'on the other side'. As a person who is both judged and upheld by the Judeo-Christian vision, I think you can particularly respond to an institution which seeks to give some of our young a second chance, a new opportunity, a new beginning that will break away the sufficating and defeating walls of past decisions and predicaments. I think you can understand that while, on one hand, the content and course offerings of such a college are representative of our 20th Century technological-humanistic society, on the other hand the action, the drive, the style, the vision of such an institution dates back to something very familiar and very holy to each one of us here. This is why I address you today as churchman, and not as citizen.

One educator who has a committment to the high-risk student is Professor William Moore, Jr. Presently working at Ohio State, Dr. Moore was for fifteen years a teacher, reading clinician and administrator in the ghetto public schools in St. Louis. In 1965 he began working with the Forest Park Community College in St. Louis. Before taking his post at Ohio State, he was president of the Seattle Central Community College. Dr. Moore has written a book about his experiences with high-risk students. It's entitled Against the Odds. It's an angry book, but also a very suggestive and helpful one. Dr. Moore is angry because he feels that although there is much that can be done, there is little being accomplished. He feels the odds are still against the high-risk student, even in the community college. His book proves that much can be done, but he feels his work may be ignored. But not only his book proves that much can be done. Dr. Moore himself is an example of the high-risk student making it against the odds:

> I was a high-risk student. According to all of the evaluative predictors, I should never have gotten a college education. My aunt once told me that I would never finish high school; the high school counselor said I probably would not get to college; the college advisor said that I was not master's degree material; and my friends told me that the Ph.D was out of the question. Fortunately, I did not know it. Since completing my schooling, I have spent eighteen of my nineteen years in education working with children and young adults from slum schools who were not supposed to be able to learn. (My experience) has convinced me that low achievers can be helped if those charged with instructing them are committed. I am angry when educators fail to do so. (XII)*

In the remaining time I wish to share with you, first, Dr. Moore's analysis of the dilemma we mentioned at the beginning; second, some concerns resulting from two workshops held this spring concerning high-risk students; and finally, questions for you.

* Moore, Jr., William, Against the Odds, Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, 1970.

To set the stage for the dilemma as analysed by Dr. Moore, we must first take a quick look at the range of goals which community colleges espouse. Community colleges are beginning to see themselves as a comprehensive institution with several goals to fulfill. In this comprehensive approach, the first goal is to provide a normal, typical educational experience for those young who wish to transfer to a four-year institution. This transfer program differs in no way from the first two years of most four-year schools, hence loss of transfer of credit is non-existent or minimal. A second goal in a comprehensive community college is to provide a high quality technical and vocational education for those young who wish to terminate their education within two years and move into employment. A third goal of our comprehensive institution (and here we begin to find the distinctive marks of the comprehensive community college) is the concern to provide a real service to their immediate community; hence there is a division within most colleges called 'community services'. In some community colleges this division is a small one. In others it stands out as the total philosophy of the school and all the other functions of the school fall in line behind it, including the two goals previously mentioned. Community services means a number of things, but it at least means adult continuing education and sensitivity to the needs of the community's various organizations and sub-cultures. The fourth goal of the comprehensive community college could fall under the previous goal, or stand by itself with the previous goal as a philosophic basis: the salvaging of those young in the vicinity of the college who are academic high risks.

Now let us look at the dilemma with this context of goals in mind. In looking over the past performance of community colleges in the mid-west and west, Dr. Moore charges the following:

> The dilemma is trying to provide a quality education for both the academically able student and the high-risk student. For the able student, the college does a creditable job. The faculty understands him and is happy to be associated with him because he is thought to be 'college material'. The school's reputation is secure with the qualified student. His accomplishments establish and maintain a good image for the college and reinforce its stature. On the other hand, the community college has not learned how to deal with, and it cannot count on, the abilities of the marginal student. It has not developed the knowhow or the real commitment for dealing with him. His academic prowess does not have a history of reflecting on the college in a positive way - if at all. The fact that this student was accepted by the community college in the first place is considered by some persons as an inherent weakness of the college. (pg. 11)

There are several components which make up this dilemma. Moore mentioned four: One, the community college is still searching for an identity. Is it an extension of high school, thus drawing its identity from the high school? Is it a feeder to four-year schools, hence deriving its identity from four-year colleges? If a community college derives its basic identity from either of these institutions, it will not become a unique institution. If it looks at its own unique and distinctive functions (goals 3 and 4 above), it could develop its own unique identity. This is part of the struggle now taking place at most community colleges. A second component creating the dilemma is the education explosion. More and more able students are seeking admission to our colleges and universities. The four-year

schools and universities are having to turn down more and more able students. Where then can they go? Why, to their own community college back home which would be delighted to have them. Given this influx of able students, the goal to solicit and serve the high-risk students begins to be pushed aside. (Given the influx of able students, how will the decision go when students will have to be turned away from the community college? Will all able students be admitted and no high-risk students? Will a quota system be employed? If so, how high will the percentage be for a high-risk student?) A third component of the dilemma is the lack of research regarding high-risk students. One one hand, we have an abundance of research on the able and excellent student who occasionally needs assistance; and on the other hand, we have very little research for the student who needs understanding and support in a drastic way. The fourth component of the dilemma is the faculty. Many faculty do not appreciate the presence of the high-risk student. They do not know how to teach him. He shows up the faculty's limitations. The faculty have little to no research to draw upon. And even if research were available (and there is some) most colleges provide no reward system or recognition for those who do achieve with the high-risk student. The importance of the faculty's ability and attitude is so important that Moore begins on the first page of his book with the following:

> One of the significant confrontations of the marginal student is his encounter with the opinion of his teachers. The collective attitude of the majority of his instructors is that he cannot learn. He perceives their attitude through the persistent, intangible, and undefined gut-feedback one gets when he knows he is not wanted. Because of this sensitivity, hundreds of his questions go unasked. Thousands go unanswered. He is the victim of the dictum: you have to be one to teach one. Many accept poor teaching for him as legitimate. The marginal student makes mistakes and sees his professors look the other way because they know neither how nor what to teach him. Some instructors who feel that the student cannot do the work do not challenge him. Some become his pal and let him get by... Other teachers challenge him beyond his capabilities, seeking to prove that he has no place in college. In either case, it is a fair statement that as a whole, those charged with assisting him devote little more than a backyard effort to the task. Few speak his language and understand his feelings. Fewer still tolerate his learning style. The term 'remedial' is spoken like a dirty word by many, including his college-age peers who are in the academic hierarches above him. (pages 1 and 2)

Is there any way we can obtain a neat profile of this high-risk student? Not really, answers Moore. There are many more differences than there are similarities among our high-risk young. The stereotype that they are either black or low-income white must be discarded. They come from the rich suburbs and from the ghettos. To illustrate his point Moore provides us with ten case studies in the book. His point is well made. Two things, however, can be stated in general. The first one is an overall statement about high-risk students. The second is a general statement about one sub-culture of high-risk students: the black young.

> High-risk students who enroll in the community college are (at the time of their admission) operating in the society at a level higher than their achievement scores on subject-matter testing instruments

indicate they are able. Marginal students have mastered most of the necessary skills, knowledges, behaviors, laws, and other confrontations with the culture with satisfactory results, or, at least, acceptable results, except the academic dimensions, which they can still learn. (pg. 71)

The black student who is educationally, socially, and economically disadvantaged is likely to be quite different when compared to the white student of the same class. He does not believe in God, Mother, and Country with the same fervor as his white couterpart or his own parents. He is candid, not given to the little charades of guile. If he does not like the teacher, he does not pretend to like him. The black student has few heroes. He knows that society destroys its heroes even while it creates them; so he looks for the feet of clay earlier. He can probably take disappointments better because in his world disappointment is a way of life. The black student will tend to be more worldly though less sophisticated academically.

He shows much more ingenuity outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom his has always been more of a spectator than a participant... The black student is probably more tolerant of injustice, stupidity, dirt, profanity, sarcasm and illegitamacy. He chooses his leaders from among those who can best represent him. He is willing to listen and associate with students that school officials do not consider good citizens because he does not feel that association produces contamination. The black student does not confide in his parents. He will rarely let a teacher or referee or some other arbiter handle the problem of confrontation between himself and another. He has been independent too long for that and he has had to solve his own problems and often bear his own misfortune without assistance, sympathy, or compromise. Many of these students...have been completely on their own since their early teens and have had to function as adults - and in all of the dimensions of adulthood - while playing the role of children in school. (pg. 49-50)

The above two quotes indeed underline the key in salvaging these young from dead end futures. It is to know that there are present many strengths and virtues now in operation in these young. It is to begin with these strengths and build from there a program which will strengthen their academic abilities. It is to begin by believing in the student, not because it is nice to do so, but because it is valid to do so.

Because it is valid to believe in these young, Moore's book is not just a criticism of community colleges or an exercise in wishful thinking. His book is a how-to book. He takes away the excuses of any college administration or faculty or student personnel that they have no guidelines or models. His book gets about as specific as one can get. In terms of salvaging our young high-risk students, the question is no longer "Can it be done?" With Moore's book the question now turns to "Will it be done?"

On March 27 and 28 of this year, I attended two workshops in Chicago that were a part of the annual convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association. The two workshops were entitled "Long Range Results - Academic Supports for the Collegiate Black and Poor" and "Innovations in Recruiting the Culturally Different". My summation of the issues and conclusions of these workshops is available in a two-page paper which you may pick up upon the conclusion of this address (see appendix). I went to the workshop with great expectations and hope. I was both excited and deeply disappointed. My disappointment was due entirely to the few people and institutions at this annual meeting who took the time to attend these workshops. My excitement was due entirely to the quality of the workshop and the people there present. But I did not miss the point. Those concerned about the high-risk students, those educators who have the vision and the commitment are also working <u>against the odds</u>. Appropriate enough, Dr. Moore was one of the participants. The workshops demonstrated to me that Dr. Moore's illustrations of success are not isolated. There are a growing number of persons and institutions working hard for the high-risk student. But the odds are still against them.

Which brings me to the concluding remarks of this presentation. My remarks to follow are but variations on one thematic question: will the church, at a local level and at a regional and national level, help change the odds in favor of salvaging our high-risk young? Will the church commit time, energy, funds, to wrestle with how this might best be accomplished? Will the church seek ways to become an advocate with others for the rights of the high-risk young and the unique task which the community college can offer here. Will the church risk a critical role in chastizing those colleges which offer much in terms of talk but nothing in terms of resources when it comes to the high-risk student?

In my study and in my attendance at workshops I have come to appreciate the fact that a quality program for the high-risk student is a tremendous undertaking. It would appear to me that only the community college can take on this task seriously and with long-range commitment. Other colleges will not see this program as deriving from their basic educational assumptions, thus when they do develop such programs (and there are now over 1000 colleges offering such programs) they will be marginal programs incidental and vunerable to the major drives of the college. Only in the community college does such a program receive fundamental support from the very educational assumptions of the college. This does not mean that this is the only function of a community college, but it does mean that it is one of the major functions, and not a marginal, incidental program tacked on as an afterthought.

"But," you say, "you have already indicated that even the community college is not really open to this function." Yes, I have indicated such, but the options are still open. Many of our community colleges need to be reminded of this function, and be reminded of their basic educational assumptions of serving the educational needs of the community. Even when a community college has turned a corner away from the high-risk student, the assumptions, the foundations for service to the high risk remain, and therefore can be raised again and again. Not so at other institutions of higher education. The question is not whether the community college will respond. The real questions for us are "Will you and I advocate for the high-risk program in the community college?" "Will you and I help change the odds?" "Will you and I go one mile and do our homework and present our concerns?" Will you and I and the church go the second mile and provide our time and the use of our buildings?"

APPENDIX

American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) workshops held on March 27 and 28 in Chicago. Highlights selected by J Springer.

Workshop #1. Long-Range Results - Academic Supports for the Collegiate Black and Poor

A. Research is both an educational and a political necessity if a group desires to change policy and program of an institution of higher education regarding the high-risk student. Research and evaluation of one's program with high-risk students is of fundamental value if one is to educate one's college and if one is to take away the many excuses and obstacles placed in the way of high-risk students.

B. Traditional admission testing tools are quite irrelevant and usually harmful when applied to high-risk students.

C. Traditional vocational tests are highly inadequate because they assume an acquaintance and understanding of many kinds of vocations. Most high-risk students have a low vocational vocabulary. One investigation in Iowa indicated that many students dropped out of the program because they still did not know what they wanted to do with their opportunity for education. Very crucial to understand this lack of vocational vocabulary, and to provide vocational mini-experience during the early part of one's college experience to both expand the vocabulary and to have some reality testing to see if that really is something the student wishes.

D. Although relevant and developmental courses are extremely important, even more important is the attitude of the staff working with the high-risk student. The staff must believe that the student can really make it. If the staff believes in the student, the student will have more motivation to believe in himself.

E. In evaluating and counseling a student, start with the student's strengths, not with his weaknesses. Look for the reasons why he can make it in college, not for the reasons he might not. Begin with where the student is and move from there.

F. Dr. Marcus Bell of the Office of Education indicated that there are now 1000 colleges offering programs for high-risk students. The Office is now beginning to inspect and evaluate these programs. Behind this inspection is the question, "To what extent do we allow colleges to program for high-risk students?" Bell questioned the quality of many of these programs.

G. A plan in operation for the past three years with thirteen black colleges was reported on. These thirteen schools developed a total new curriculum for a proportion of their students which was based on the assumption that educating for blacks is different from educating for whites. Additional assumptions were that there must be respect for the teacher and for the student, and, that developmental education should be the philosophy of education. Results: 50% of those partaking the courses graduated in four years, which is unheard of in Black Colleges. The curriculum design is now being appropriated by other Black Colleges in the South. Dr. Fred Humphries, who gave this report, urged those who are developing curriculums to draw upon the resources and research of this program.

Workshop #2 Innovations in Recruiting and Retaining the Culturally Different

Part One - Recruiting*

A. Are high school students not in the college preparatory curriculum encouraged to consider college in your community?

B. You must get the word out to the student's turf, to where he hangs out, to his sub-culture. You must make the first step.

C. In recruitment, don't make promises you cannot keep.

D. If you wish a model of imagination for recruitment, see what your college coach does. He's been recruiting for years and knows how and where to go.

Part Two - Retaining

A. In terms of retention, Curtis Leonard of Temple urged that the counselor of the marginal student needed to focus primarily upon growth and personal accountability, and secondarily upon grade upgrading. Do the first and the second will follow. Leonard also suggested that the counselor begin to monitor the classrooms, and that the counselor take on more aggressive action. In the final analysis, Leonard felt that the real client for the counselor was not the student, but the sick institution.

B. Mr. James Griggs, Circle Campus of the University of Illinois, made a strong argument for the demise of non-credit remedial programs. He was able to establish credit for his supposedly remedial work when he was able to jump his students from remedial courses to second level credit courses. (An interesting by-product here is that through imaginative teaching, the campus is beginning to look at what Griggs is doing as a model for their regular programs.)

C. Dr. William Moore got very specific about the marginal student. Whether a new program has been imaginatively designed for this marginal student, or whether he faces a traditional program, that student still has to make it, now that he is there. What can you do? First, you take away his excuses: 1) Throw away the catalogue and simplify for him the critical dates and requirements. Post the critical dates in the classrooms and in the bathrooms. 2) Concerning the fifteen to twenty forms he has to fill out, make little cards summarizing these forms and scatter across the campus. 3) Before enrolling, bring them to the campus early and give them a dry run of the places and the lines he will have to put up with when he does enroll. Registration is bad enough for the 'average' student. 4) Assign these students an older student who functions as a keeper (keep him in school) and pay the keeper on the basis of retention. 5) Choose your counselor very carefully. They too have hang-ups. They should not be dealing with life styles as if they are mental pathologies. 6) Make sure your student knows who and what to avoid. Find those professors who will go another step for the student, who will counsel as well as teach and grade. 7) Counselor, make sure you are on the curriculum committee. You should be involved as part of the teaching team.

* In his book, Against the Odds, William Moore quotes D. M. Knoell from an article of hers in Junior College Journal, 1968, 39, pg. 9-11, entitled "Are Our Colleges Really Accessible to the Poor?" Moore's quote appears in his book on page 95.

> Do admissions procedures make it easy to admit and offer financial aid to the disadvantaged applicant who "discovers" the college too late to meet the admission date? Does the college have unconventional means of seeking, informing, and assisting the disadvantaged who might otherwise be passed by? Are funds available for testing, physical exams, evaluation of financial need, transportation, formal application for admission, and other fees? Is some financial aid available for very poor high-risk students, or is it given only to "safe" students? Does the admissions office use students to recruit? Are special recruitment materials and techniques employed to reach disadvantaged students in high school and in the community?